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ABSTRACT

By distinguishing between the Soviet government and the Russian people in Soviet studies, teachers can assist students in forming positive but realistic attitudes about Russia. Geography, music, art, and literature offer a wealth of information about Russia. A good starting point is a discussion of Russian children: the age at which they enter school, their membership in the "Young Octoberists," entertainment, living situations, and a look at Russian cities. A discussion of geography should include information about the Soviet Union's vast size, the Russian people's strong emotional ties to the soil, Russia's long history of protecting her borders from invaders, and the effects of Russia's severe climate on the people and culture. Music and art can be used to narrate the history of the Russian people. Folk and Cossack songs can be compared to American cowboy and slave songs. The lives and music of Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich communicate information about Tsarist Russia and the Soviet regime, respectively. Russian art, particularly church decorations, icons, and portraits, express the traditional values and lifestyles of the Russian people, as do fables, stories, and poems. (LP)

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Russian Studies: Teaching American Elementary-Middle School Children About Russia

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Abstract

By the time children leave middle school their basic attitudes about other nations are firmly laid foundations. Not the least of their concerns in the future will be survival in close contact with people who are politically and culturally different. Teaching Russian studies in an American classroom may be difficult due to the strained relations between our two countries. Robert Hunter of Georgetown University explained that "We have to find ways of living with the Soviets on this small planet, crowded with nuclear weapons." George Kennan of Princeton has said that educators can help children see Russians as people and stress the possibility of peaceful relationships. We can teach Russia's cultural and historical roots to our children by using geography and the pristine emotional attitudes found in music, art, and literature, hence avoiding a whole Pandora's box of prejudice found in our society. The recommended teaching methods are not incompatible with those advocated by recognized educational authorities: Kohlberg, Riesman, McCaslin and Ward. By explicitly distinguishing between the Soviet government, which has been in existence for only sixty years, and the people, whose cultural roots go back 1,500 years; it is hoped that our children can form a positive, but realistic attitude about the Russian people.

Even a child of six years has an understanding of world cultures -- a superficial one. By the time children leave middle school their basic attitudes about other nations are firmly laid foundations (Riesman p. 21). Not the least of their concerns in the future will be survival in close contact with people who are culturally and politically different. Thus, teaching American children about Russian culture is relevant. Aspiring teachers need not look for a textbook to teach Russian culture.

Textbooks do not tell about Russia's cultural and emotional roots. These roots are historical, but are very "present" to people there today. We can teach them to our children by using geography and the pristine emotional attitudes found in music, art, and literature, hence avoiding a whole Pandora's Box of prejudices found in our society. For the sake of clarity we must leave out many other ethnic groups living in the USSR today, although each has a unique story not to be confused with the Russians, despite their historical relationships.

The purpose of this article is to present a plan of study that gives American children a positive, but realistic idea of Russia's culture and history. Teaching Russian studies in an American classroom may be difficult due to the strained relations between our two countries. Justification for teaching Russian studies and an explanation of the complexity of the problems between Russia and the United States have been aptly stated in current articles by scholars in the field of international relations.

Robert Hunter of Georgetown University explains the problem in his article "Soviet Barbarism on Full Display," published in The Hartford Courant this past September. He concludes that "We have to find ways of living with the Soviets on the same small planet, crowded with nuclear weapons" (Hunter, p. 9). George Kennan, historian at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, former Pulitzer Prize winner and former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, has dealt with Soviet American relations for fifty years and still finds reason for optimism. He points out that we lived in peace for over a century with the Empire of the Tsars and have continued to do so with Communist Russia for six decades in this century. He sees no real reason why this cannot continue (Kennan, p. 49).

Education can help Americans see Russians as humans, not as a species of demon. This new outlook would allow us to work together where the interests of the Soviets and the Americans coincide--education, environmental preservation and public health (Kennan, pp. 49-53). Educators can help children see Russians as people and can stress the possibility of peaceful relationships. This, in turn, will allow children to form more valid ideas about Russia.

Advice for Teachers

Because of negative political coverage by the mass media in the United States, students will bring prejudices against anything Russian into the classroom. When prejudices appear, face them squarely, in a free and open discussion where it will be explained away. Always explain that Soviet is the government, whereas Russian is the people. Perhaps the best resource for overcoming student prejudice is guest speakers who have recently arrived from Russia or other Eastern European countries.

The following section of text explains some of the activities which present day Russian children experience. Use it as a starting point for class discussion concerning the similarities between Russian children and American children.

(Refer to Chukovsky, O'Dell, Panova, Shipler and White for more information about Russian children's experiences.)

Russian children enter school at age seven; however many of them already know how to read by that time. The extended family living situations allow the children to have another adult, usually a grand parent, with them while their parents work. Their grandmothers will often have taught them to read using folk and fairy tales. Many children will have been introduced to Tolstoy and Pushkin before they even enter a formal school.

Seven to nine year olds belong to "The Young Octoberists," an organization which encourages them to study, to be honest and truthful and to live happily together. Octoberists wear lapel badges which show Lenin as a boy. Ten to fourteen year olds belong to the Pioneers, an organization which trains them to be politically aware and to become fighters for the Communist cause (White, pp. 301-302).

During summer vacation, many children attend a Pioneer Camp for six weeks. These are very similar to Boy Scout and Girl Scout camps in the United States. The major difference is the Pioneers' emphasis on political indoctrination. One pathway of a Pioneer Camp is a memorial to children who died performing heroic deeds for their country. Pictures and signs printed about them line the memorial pathway.

Russians seem to be continually engaged in remembrance of wars and heroes. Honor students aged fourteen to seventeen keep guard at the tomb

for the unknown soldiers in most cities. These young guards wear uniforms and march into place to stand at attention at the tomb, changing at fifteen minute intervals. Russian brides come to the tomb directly from their wedding ceremony and lay down their wedding bouquets, solemnly, as a prayer for peace and in the hope that their husbands and sons will never go away to war.

For fun, Russian children living in big cities like Moscow or Leningrad go to visit a museum, park or palace of a former czar or prince. Parks have beautiful flowers, statues and fountains, but littering or walking on the grass is prohibited. Many beds of red begonias, Peter the Great's favorite flower, are planted in parks and palace gardens. There are few movie theatres, but opera and ballet are very popular. Russian television is owned by the government and programing consists of news, sports, and cultural programs.

Children in the cities live in concrete block apartment buildings or in older baroque houses converted into apartments. They usually walk to school. Children who live in the country between Leningrad and Novogrod live in ornately carved nineteenth century peasant houses. These houses are privately owned and have small flower and vegetable gardens adjoining them.

One big difference between Russian cities and our cities is that Russian cities have no advertising; there is no competition because the government owns all stores. Consumer goods are scarce. Shopping involves standing in line for hours to buy the food and supplies a family needs. On sides of buildings and along highways, where advertising is seen in our country, Russia has larger than life paintings of Lenin, the father of Russian communism. Most towns have a street named after Lenin, and a park

with a statue of Lenin. Lenin medals are awarded to school children for excellence in conduct or academics. Lenin medals are sold for a few kopecs each at newsstands all over Russia.

As you can see, there is ample material for comparison between the two cultures. Family life, advertising, remembrance of the dead, entertainment--all can be compared to their counterparts in American culture.

Once a common bond has been established, students are ready to move into the content. It is now hoped that now they can see how similar Russian children are to them; they will want to know more about the Russian children's heritage. The major areas that should be concentrated on are geography, music, art, and literature. Geography is necessary to give students an understanding of the vastness of the Soviet Union. Through the music, art and literature, the history of the Russian people will come alive in song, pictures, and story. This is the best way to help children understand the emotional feelings behind the Russians' firm belief in the motherland.

Methods for Communicating Content to Students

Geography

The USSR is the largest country in the world (about 2½ times the size of the United States are a population of about 300,000,000). But only half the people, about 140,000,000 live in its Russian Republic including Siberia. Russia is the dominant national republic which comprises the USSR. Refer to this as "Russia," which is historically and technically correct to do. For the sake of clarity, leave out the many other peoples living in the USSR, despite their historical relationships.

It is important to make students understand that Russia's emotional roots are tied to the soil. There are three deep elements of the Russian

character which have been constant for centuries. They are the feelings they have for the Russian Orthodox Church, the throne which represents authority, and the motherland. The name they have for their motherland is rodina. Rodina means birth of family land. It has deep connotations to a Russian who hears it, especially when he's cast out of it or when he's in danger (Shipler, p. 94).

Students looking at a map of Russia can see that the borders of the USSR today equal about 1½ times the length of the equator. You should call to their attention that the Soviets have a lot of border to defend without natural barriers such as oceans to separate them from invaders. That's why Russia's history is closely related to her geography. Now give students an outline map to be filled in during your geography lecture. (The completed map can be graded for an evaluation.) Story-telling, lecture-type lessons, and the use of maps in conjunction with slides and photographs work well.

As you explain Russia's geography, you are also teaching about the 1,500 year history of Russia: Begin with the ninth century city states of Kiev and Novgorod. Explain that they were able to hold off the Polovtsian, German and Swedish invaders. Continue with the Mongols and Tartars who came across the open prairie on the southern border, 1240 AD, and stayed until 1480 AD when the princes of Moscow kicked them out. Tell of Ivan IV's (the Terrible) aggressive attack down the Volga River to the Caspian Sea in which he captured the Tartar cities of Kazan and Astrakhan. (This was the first time Russia captured foreign territory.) Tell of Cossack adventurers who crossed Siberia, reached the Sea of Okhotsk and excited the Chinese Manchus to war, just for the adventure of it and won (Lensen, pp. 40-50). Thus, expanding the Russian border to the Pacific

Ocean.

Explain that while Russia was holding off invaders by expanding to the south and east, Poland, in the west, had been expanding at Russia's expense for centuries. It was only in the seventeenth century that the Russians were able to stop the Poles and push them back across the flatlands of "Belarussia" (Heppell, p. 90).

Continue with Peter the Great taking the Baltic coast from the Swedes (present-day Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). Explain that this happened after the Swedes invaded Russia, and Peter defeated them at the Battle of Poltavia in 1709 (Massie, 1980, pp. 494-506). You will want to include the French invasion of Poland under Napoleon in 1812 (see Tchaikovsky under music). Your lecture might conclude with the two German invasions of 1917-1918 and 1941-1945. You may want to explain that the German invasions came across the flatlands of Poland. Moral issues come into focus here: Russia's control of Poland today seems immoral to us. But when you look at history as the Russians do, as a series of border defenses, you begin to understand the reasoning behind such invasions.

Have students discuss the morality of killing and seizing lands. Compare the Russian invasions with the invasion of the American Indians' territory by European settlers. After discussions give students time to write about their feelings and about the facts they've learned. Students acquire a personal way of seeing things and have an opportunity to translate it into words. The teacher then has a basis for evaluation.

In order to reinforce geography lessons you might like to use the classroom floor as a map. Have students divide into groups of Swedes, Russians, Tartars, and Mongols and walk through the invasions of the

Russian homeland. In doing this students will see that the Russians needed discipline and a strong leader. This method of intrinsic learning, called creative dramatics, was developed and used by Nellie McCaslin (pp. 9-16) and Winifred Ward (pp. 15-27). It can be very effective in the classroom.

Moral judgment maturity is facilitated by giving the child role-taking opportunities (p. 402). Kohlberg has said that children ages ten to twelve reach a stage at which they are able to discuss issues which concern society as a whole. It follows that a sensitive teacher who takes the intelligence and maturity of students into consideration can handle the above suggested activity. Teachers opposed to war games on principle might choose to dispense with this but should find some other means of emphasizing the Russians' security problems, of dramatizing the close relationship between geographic vulnerability and human culture, in this case a <u>military</u> culture.

<u>Russia's Climate</u>

It would not suffice to teach Russia's geography without including her dismaying climate. Eighty percent of Russia is above 50° north latitude. Its vast inland area is open to the blasts of central Asian winds, which are frigid in winter, often -30° F, and dry with little snow. Summer temperatures rise as high as 90° F and its very dry. Russian agriculture is vulnerable to the consequences of climate (Kluchevsky, pp. 226-251). Farming there is somewhat of a gamble because of the brief growing season, poor soil, and unreliable rainfall (Pipes, pp. 7-12). Mismanagement of agricultural production and of transportation of crops to markets, coupled with the climate makes it quite apparent that Russia's food supply problem is significant (Wadeken, pp. 339-40).

(Refer to Kireevski, Kluchevsky, Kochan, Lensen, R. Massie, S. Massie, Miller, and Pipes for more geography content material.)

Methods for Teaching Music

At first the music and art seem to stand alone without relations. But each is a way of narrating linearly the history of the Russian people. Music can set a mood which can open a child's whole being to the history of the people who created that music. Folk and Cossack songs, Tchaikovsky, and Shostakovich span the events of the last five centuries. Records of their music are available here in the United States.

Folk and Cossack Songs

You should tell the children that folk and Cossack songs convey many moods. There are mournful folk songs of peasant women spinning or coachmen driving across the endless steppe. These songs show the melancholy to which Russians will abandon themselves for days, only to jump out of it into a delirious joy of life, love and the beauties of nature. At this time, they sing songs of wild delight. It's an emotional music, from people who give in to their emotions and don't hide, moderate or repress them (Miller, pp. 88-90).

Good examples of Russian folk songs are:

The Song of the Volga Boatmen--the refrain, "Hey, let's heave," shows the sorrow of the laborer and the strength of his endurance. These laborers are pulling a barge up river, harnessed together like mules, in a gang of about twenty-five.

Kalinka shows the delirious joy of a young man meeting the girl of his dreams. A "kalinka" is a berry which reminds him of the young girl's cheeks that are very pink on her very white face.

Evening Bells is about a man who becomes melancholy because he's far

from home and the place where his family used to live. Family and home, as Evening Bells shows, are strong magnets for every adult Russian's soul (Shipler, p. 94).

You will want to compare the lives of Cossacks of the Russian steppe with cowboy life on the American prairie through a comparison of the songs of both groups. American negro spirituals can be compared with Russian folk tunes; both were written by suppressed people. Their music, expressing their sorrow, helped them endure life.

Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky refined folk music for symphonic orchestra. Present his 1812 Overture to students. The historical background of the composition itself, the drama of the sound effects (compares with today's electronic music), and the excessiveness of Russian patriotism, combined with the loveliness of the prayer song and the simple beauty of the children's chorus help the 1812 Overture reveal the emotionality of the Russian people. Perhaps the best recording of the 1812 Overture is that by Igor Buketoff with the New Philharmonic Orchestra for RCA Red Seal (USA LSC-3051). The record cover will give you much useful information for your presentations.

Tchaikovsky's music can serve as an introduction to Tsarist Russia. Topics for discussion include comparisons (1) of democracy and autocracy and (2) of patriotism in Russia during the Tsarist period (early 1800's). Have students research and then write reports.

Shostakovich

Possibly the best way to communicate the Soviet regime to children is to teach about Shostakovich's life and music. His music reflects his own experiences which were indicative of the Russian people's experiences in

general. The historical background of Shostakovich's music is a revelation of life under the Soviet regime. Communism became a dictatorship under Stalin. Artists were forced to create "for the glory of the government" (Volokov, p. xxxvi). Read some of Shostakovich's biography, Testimony, to your students and then play the music.

His way of defying and exposing evils through art makes Shostakovich a good model for the children we teach. Tell them about his Symphony No. 7, often called the Leningrad Symphony. This symphony was supposed to show the gloom of the city under the Germans in World War II, but Shostakovich actually had in mind the pre-war purge of Leningrad (1935-36) when nearly one-fourth of the inhabitants were arrested by Stalin's police and sent to labor camps (Volokov, pp. 154-156). Call attention to his tragic musical codes in the symphony's second movement.

Be sure to play some of Shostakovich's delightful music in class. During the nineteen-twenties, he was very popular in Leningrad where American jazz was the rage. Shostakovich arranged Tea for Two for symphony orchestra and called it Thaiti Trot (Starr, p. 59). Well known compositions--Age of Gold Polka and his choral symphony, A Song of the Forests--are delightful music which appeals to children. The latter can be played as background music while students write spelling words or penmanship exercises. Soon they will begin to ask questions about the music.

(References to check for more music content material refer to S. Massie, Seaman, Starr, and Volokov.)

Methods for Teaching Russian Art

Much of Russia's art is seen in cathedrals and churches. The architecture, with colorful multi-spired roofs, are unique, and the ikons

inside the churches are mysteriously beautiful. Finely lined and delicately drawn with fragile glowing colors or bold colors, an ikon is a representation or likeness of some sacred person, saint or angel. Ikon art was born in the Greek Christian churches in about 100 AD, but the Russians made it their own art form. Although Russian people have respect for ikons, they worship only God (Billington, 1970, pp. 7-14).

Obtain several books of Russian art from your local library. Become familiar with the paintings. Select a few to show to your students. You may want to compare Repin and Kustodiev, who idealized Russian family life, to Norman Rockwell's interpretation of life in the United States. Leave art books around the classroom and give students time to examine them or to copy the paintings that they like.

When teaching about the Mongolian invasion of the Russian steppe, you may want to show your students Vereschagin's painting, The Apothesis of War. In order to teach their enemies a lesson, the Mongols piled skulls of enemies in pyramids in open fields. Vereschagin's painting shows vultures flying or pecking among the skulls. Children may be disturbed to see this, but they will never forget it--just as Russians never do when they think of China today.

Show students portraits of Catherine the Great. The one by Borovidsky of her walking her dog at Tsarcoe Selo is particularly appealing to children. Boys like the portrait of Peter the Great by Art de Gelden. Tell students briefly about Catherine and Peter, then let them research and write reports.

The Russian artist, Ivanov of the early nineteenth century produced water-color scenes of the Bible. The musical, prismatic quality of Ivanov's work can be compared to the work of England's William Blake

Bowlt, p. 168). However, nineteenth-century Russian art was mainly concerned with two things: social problems and the Russian land. Repin and other social painters made people aware of the sufferings of the peasants by showing sad moments of their life--pulling barges, burying a father-breadwinner--in a stark, realistic style. Repin's paintings show sympathy and respect for lowly people (Valkenier, p. 169). The social painters show not only what the nineteenth-century revolutionaries fought to change, but also how art was used to make people revolutionary.

The princes and tsars of "Old Russia" built baroque palaces that dwarf Versailles in size and splendor. Show children pictures of the Catherine Palace or the Winter Palace. These can be compared with mansions in our country. Make sure you discuss the source of the wealth and the labor needed to build those palaces.

Cartoon art is very popular in Russia and is used by the Soviets to carry messages to the newspaper-reading public. Every newspaper has some, but the weekly humor paper Krokodil has the best. Their cartoons compare with ones found in our newspapers or The New Yorker.

Illustrations of Russian folk and fairy tales are appealing to people of all ages. The Yershovs' illustrations in The Fire Bird and Bilbin's for Pushkin's Tale of the Fair Swan Princess are examples of Russia's finest illustrative art. You might want to enlarge one, using an opaque projector, to use as a back drop for a play based on a Russian fairy tale.

(References to check for more art content material refer to Billington, Bowlt, Massie, and Zvoyrkin (Kennedy, J..)

Methods for Teaching Russian Literature and Poetry

Nineteenth-century writers Pushkin and Tolstoy are the best loved

and most widely read by educated people in Russia today. Introduce Tolstoy using his fables and folk stories or his first short novels, Childhood, Boyhood and Youth. Although they're about the dreams and ambitions of a boy of the nineteenth-century nobility, his characters are w itten with a blend of beauty and blemishes, with such selective realism, that they belong to people of any age. His prose is both simple and vivid. The reader relives that time. We can feel the enchantment as the little boy goes on a fox hunt, but stops under a tree:

> My attention was diverted by a butterfly with yellow wings fluttering most alluringly before me. No sooner had it attracted my notice than it flew a little way off and, circling a few times about a nearly dead clover, alighted on it. I do not know whether it was warming itself in the sun or sucking nectar from the flower, at all events it seemed very happy.
>
> (Tolstoy, 1964, p. 34)

Tolstoy's writing in Childhood can be introduced in the same way you would Alcott's Little Men or Little Women. Tell students that the writing is both a work of literary art and a fairly accurate historical record of the education and philosophical development of a boy of the nobility in pre-revolutionary Russia. Alcott wrote about upper class nineteenth century Americans. Read aloud a few humorous or sentimental passages from Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth. Then have students read further on their own. Have discussions in class. Help students make comparisons between Tolstoy's novels and Little Men or Little Women.

Tolstoy's fables and folk stories show the gay humor, forthrightfulness

and wisdom of the Russian peasant. He wrote many of them for textbooks to be used in peasant schools which he set up on his estates. He first wrote them in his educated language, then read them aloud to the peasants. He asked them for corrections which he used in his final copy (Rosenthal, pp. xiv-xvi). Two of his best fables are The Raven and His Young and Peter the First and the Peasant, both written in 1872. Three of his best folk stories are Emelyn and the Empty Drum, The Three Questions, and How Much Land Does a Man Need? His books are available at libraries everywhere.

Russian folk poems, called byliny, are about tall tale characters. One of the best is Ilya Muromets, the story of a peasant who sat for seventeen years in silence at home until some passing pilgrims told him the country was in danger from the Polovtsians. Upon receiving this news, he got up and rode off, taming dragons on his way to help the Prince of Kiev. The Prince made him a knight! Students would find many comparisons between Ilya Muromets and Paul Bunyan or Davy Crockett.

To fully appreciate the music of Pushkin's writing, it needs to be read aloud. Have someone with a good reading voice read verses of Pushkin's The Tale of the Tsar Saltan and the Fair Swan Princess. This story has everything: adventure, a beautiful setting, magic and verse.

Sighing thoughtfully, the swan
Murmured: "Why so far, Guidon?
Know your future bride is here--
I am that princess, my dear."
Then she spread her wings, to soar
O'er the waves towards the shore.
There amid a clump of trees,

Folded them with graceful ease,
Shook herself, and then and there
Turned into a maiden fair--
In her braids a crescent beamed,
On her brow, a bright star gleamed;
She was sweet in form and face,
Full of majesty and grace.
When she spoke, her sweet voice seemed
Like a flow of tinkling streams.

(Pushkin, p. 18)

For stories about the lives of Soviet-Russian children, read those of Kornei Chukovsky and Vera Panova. Panova writes of the problems of the average urban child. On Far-Away Street, written in 1968, is a story of a seven year old boy, Seryozha, growing up on a collective farm. It's a sensitively written story of the relationship of a child and a stepfather. This book was made into a movie, A Summer to Remember, and was very popular both in Russia and abroad.

Read aloud to children beginning with a short fable or fairy story. Then provide books and time for the children to read on their own. You might like them to choose a story to be written into a play. Activities to include are script writing, editing, advertising, costumes, scenery. Russian music can be used as background. The results can be dazzling.

An interesting paradox for discussion is that these lovely works of Russian art, music and literature were created by a people who lived in a hostile climate, under harsh, restrictive governments, and who lived in constant fear of invasion.

(References to check for more literature and poetry material are Chukovsky, R. Massie, S. Massie, Panova, Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Zvorykin.)

Summary

Russian music, art, and literature can carry an amazing amount of history into the classroom. At the same time, the sheer aesthetic beauty of these works will reach students on an emotional level. The geography content shows Russia's geographic vulnerability and at the same time gives a sense of geography's impact on a culture. The recommended teaching methods are not incompatible with those advocated by recognized educational authorities: Kohlberg, Riesman, McCaslin and Ward. By facing prejudice squarely in a free and open discussion; and by explicitly distinguishing between the government, which has been in existence for only sixty years, and the people, whose cultural roots go back over 1,500 years; it is hoped that our children can form a positive, but realistic attitude about the Russian people.

Notes: This paper was written as a result of my attendance at the Yale-Hopkins Seminar on Methods of Teaching Russian Affairs at New Haven in the summer of 1982 and in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1983. I wish to thank William Burgess of the Yale Russian East European Outreach Program for his comments on this manuscript. I wish to thank Lisa Spencer of the English Department of the University of Connecticut for editing the manuscript.

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